

VZCZCXRO5092
PP RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHKI #0126/01 0321324
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 011324Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5526
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000126

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [MOPS](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: FIGHTING ERUPTS BETWEEN BANYAMULENGE TROOPS IN
MINEMBWE REGION OF SOUTH KIVU

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Limited fighting between Banyamulenge (Congolese Tutsi) troops of non-integrated brigades of the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) and of dissident armed forces broke out in the Minembwe region of South Kivu province January 25 and continued sporadically through January 29. Details concerning the origins of the fighting remain unclear. MONUC and the FARDC report the situation is currently under control but remains volatile. Transitional Vice President Azarias Ruberwa, whose RCD party has fought to defend the interests of the Banyamulenge, does not believe the attacks were part of a larger effort to target the population of Minembwe. End summary.

¶2. (C) A skirmish broke out late January 25 between elements of the non-integrated 112th Brigade of the FARDC, commanded by General Patrick Masunzu, and elements of the so-called "Moramvia Group" led by Colonel Michel Rukunda. Both sides are from the same Congolese Tutsi subgroup known as Banyamulenge (singular: Munyamulenge). The fighting occurred in Bijombo, about 25 miles west of Uvira.

¶3. (C) MONUC officials told us it is still not clear who fired first or what prompted the incident. They suspected Rukunda's group initiated the fighting after Masunzu arrested a local territory administrator, a fellow Munyamulenge, for meeting earlier in the week with a dissident military leader, Colonel Venant Bisogo, who commands the so-called "Group of 47" in the Minembwe area.

¶4. (C) Low-level fighting between the 112th and the Moramvia Group continued through January 28 when shooting temporarily ceased. Hostilities picked up the morning of January 29 when some of Rukunda's forces attacked positions of the 112th in Kalingi, six miles east of Minembwe. Masunzu then called for reinforcements, including elements of the 12th Integrated Brigade (most of whom are non-Banyamulenge), to attack Rukunda's headquarters in Ilundu just a mile from Masunzu's own headquarters in Minembwe.

¶5. (C) Shooting continued January 29-30 in various locations of the High Plateau region. Masunzu claims to have pushed Rukunda's forces back nearly 20 miles north of Minembwe and forced Bisogo from his headquarters in Kilombo, about 30 miles north of Uvira. Some of Rukunda's troops reportedly attacked a battalion of the 12th IB January 29 in Lemero, 50 miles north of Uvira, capturing two soldiers.

¶6. (C) MONUC officials who have spoken to both Masunzu and Rukunda report that at least five soldiers from Rukunda's ranks were killed and seven were injured. Two of Rukunda's

officers, both reportedly captains, were captured by Masunzu's troops. Masunzu claims five of his forces were wounded in the fighting. As of January 31, the general High Plateau region was quiet with no reports of renewed fighting. MONUC's chief military spokesman Lt. Col. Didier Rancher in his weekly press conference January 31 said the situation in Minembwe was under control and urged the Congolese not to over-dramatize the incident.

UNDERLYING ETHNIC TENSIONS

¶17. (C) The fighting is partially a result of the underlying ethnic tensions in South Kivu and highlights growing splits within the Banyamulenge community itself. The 112th Brigade commander General Patrick Masunzu led Banyamulenge troops throughout the DRC's civil war. The brigade is composed mainly of Banyamulenge and believed to have about 400 soldiers. Masunzu was assigned as the 4th Military Region Deputy Commander in Western Kasai in 2004. He left that area soon after his appointment to return to Minembwe, his birthplace, claiming he had to "defend" the interests of the Banyamulenge. He is technically on "administrative leave" from the 4th Military Region and has been allowed to operate freely in South Kivu, thanks to his close relationship with President Kabila and the assent of FARDC commanders in the province.

¶18. (C) Rukunda and the Moramvia Group are dissident Banyamulenge FARDC troops who split from Masunzu in late 2005 over Masunzu's leadership and the alleged mistreatment of the Banyamulenge community by the FARDC. Rukunda is believed to have approximately 100 troops under his command spread

KINSHASA 00000126 002 OF 003

throughout the region, and he claims to enjoy some degree of support among a heavily-armed civilian population.

¶19. (C) The Group of 47 is made up of Banyamulenge soldiers once loyal to Colonel Jules Mutebusi who fled the country in 2004 after the siege of Bukavu. The group, numbering less than 100, infiltrated back into the Minembwe region a year later.

¶10. (C) Relations among the three groups have been strained the past two years, but there has never been large-scale fighting that spread beyond their immediate area. Despite the common ethnicity of Masunzu, Rukunda and Bisogo, all three are competing for the support of the High Plateau Banyamulenge, leading to intense rivalries, particularly with Masunzu. Each wants to be considered the primary military leader of the regional community and refuses to back down to challenges from the others. Bisogo and Rukunda are alleged to have formed a loose alliance in the past month, reportedly even combining their forces in some areas.

RUBERWA'S REACTION

¶11. (C) The Minembwe fighting caused immediate concern in Kinshasa among officials with the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), including Transitional Vice President Ruberwa. Ruberwa, who has championed the cause of the Banyamulenge, held late-night meetings January 29 at his house in Kinshasa with other Tutsi and Banyamulenge leaders to discuss the situation.

¶12. (C) Ruberwa told the Ambassador January 30 that Masunzu initiated the attacks on Rukunda. (Note: Masunzu is a longtime opponent of the RCD, part of the complicated politics of the community. End note.) Ruberwa said he had spoken by phone that day with DRC Air Force Commander General John Numbi and FARDC Land Forces Commander General Gabriel Amisi, both in Goma, for an assessment of the

situation. Ruberwa indicated he had received assurances from unnamed officials -- but presumably Amisi and Numbi, among others -- that Masunzu had not received specific orders to initiate an attack. He said he also planned to meet in person with FARDC Chief of Staff Kisempia Sungilanga January 31. Ruberwa added that he did not believe the fighting was part of an effort to target the Banyamulenge community.

¶13. (C) Ruberwa characterized the current conflict as a fight for influence and control of the greater Banyamulenge community. Ruberwa said he believes the current situation has the potential to develop into a wider intra-ethnic battle. He said the Banyamulenge are combative by nature and will not back down, unlike the soldiers in many other FARDC units, risking instead to keep on killing each other despite such actions being to their disadvantage.

¶14. (C) Ruberwa added that the immediate objective in Minembwe is to end the fighting. He suggested the best next step available would be to begin a "mixage" of dissident forces with those of the FARDC. (Note: "Mixage" is process meant to create new brigades by combining "renegade" Congolese troops and elements of the FARDC's non-integrated brigades, and leaving them stationed in their current operational zones. End note.) A similar "mixage" is currently underway in North Kivu with elements loyal to renegade General Laurent Nkunda and non-integrated FARDC brigades.

A BANYAMULENGE PERSPECTIVE

¶15. (C) Masunzu and other South Kivu officials claim that Masunzu's arrest of the local administrator, which may have triggered the latest fighting, was unjustified. Enock Ruberangabo, a Munyamulenge from South Kivu, told PolOff Group of 47 commander Bisogo had been invited to the administrator's residence by 10th Military Region commander General Sylvain Tshikwey to discuss the possibility of having the Group of 47 disarm and integrate into the FARDC. Such discussions have been ongoing between Bisogo and FARDC officials for the past year, but have gained momentum in the last few months.

¶16. (C) Ruberangabo said Masunzu was either apparently unaware of Tshikwey's decision to call Bisogo to Minembwe or

KINSHASA 00000126 003 OF 003

he chose to blatantly ignore it and arrest the administrator. Rukunda repeated the same story to MONUC officials in Uvira, saying Bisogo was in Minembwe at Tshikwey's invitation. Ruberangabo said Masunzu used the Bisogo meeting as "proof" local officials were planning a conspiracy with dissident forces.

¶17. (C) Ruberangabo said he suspects Masunzu may also have acted without authorization from Kinshasa or FARDC authorities in an effort to maintain his authority in Minembwe. The 112th Brigade has in the last two months been going through the demobilization and military integration process, which Masunzu initially opposed. Ruberangabo and MONUC officials speculated that Masunzu's attack on Rukunda may have been a deliberate attempt to halt the demobilization process and to demonstrate that his continued presence in Minembwe is essential to the region's stability.

FARDC COMMANDER TO VISIT MINEMBWE

¶18. (C) General Tshikwey is reportedly planning to visit the Minembwe region to assess the situation. Numbi and Amisi, both currently in Goma, told Ruberwa they also plan to send representatives to the area and may travel there themselves in the next few days. A joint MONUC-FARDC delegation may travel to the area from Uvira as soon as February 1.

COMMENT: FACTS UNCERTAIN, BUT NO CAUSE FOR ALARM YET

¶19. (C) Comment: What precipitated the Minembwe fighting, as well as what actually occurred and how serious it was, is difficult to determine, as each side has vested interests in blaming the other for the hostilities. The fact that Ruberwa does not seem to be laying blame for the fighting on the Presidency or the FARDC high command indicates the situation is largely localized and can be contained. But signs of Banyamulenge "aggression," real or imagined, could jeopardize the participation of the RCD and Ruberwa in the yet-to-be-formed government, potentially contributing to Ruberwa missing a government appointment and moving him into the ranks of the political opposition. President Kabila's recent visit to South Kivu, however, was very likely focused on the security issues stemming from the High Plateau region, indicating Masunzu may not have acted independently.

¶20. (C) Comment continued: Rukunda and Bisogo appear to be repeating the recent history of renegade General Laurent Nkunda and Ituri militia leaders who have used military pressure to force negotiations with the GDRC, creating more favorable terms for "surrender." The fighting in Minembwe, though, carries ramifications far beyond South Kivu, especially as military instability in the East often results in political instability in Kinshasa and more than passing interest in Rwanda. Any perceived attacks on the Banyamulenge could risk reprisals from Nkunda and his Tutsi loyalists in North Kivu. Fighting involving the Banyamulenge in particular is politically sensitive and carries repercussions in the capital. This current battle is a new factor and goes against the historical record of the complicated politics in the region, since the Banyamulenge have traditionally been a unified group arrayed against outside influences. End comment.
MEECE